



BREATHING SPACE

Respiratory Disease Newsletter

*Health Promotion & Chronic Disease Division
Chronic Disease & Environmental Epidemiology Section*



Volume 1, Number 2

June 2003

Welcome to BREATHING SPACE, a quarterly respiratory disease newsletter.

This newsletter is produced by the Minnesota Department of Health. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide health professionals, school nurses, and community members with current research, information, and resources on respiratory disease.

This newsletter is also distributed electronically. To receive an electronic version, contact:
jennifer.walker@health.state.mn.us
or go to the MDH asthma website at:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma.

What's inside?

- Asthma Mortality
- Asthma School Study
- MDH Asthma Staff
- Asthma Information Center
- Asthma Action Plan
- Upcoming Events
- Check It Out
- PACE Training Update
- Women and COPD

Mesothelioma Investigation Findings

Mesothelioma is a rare cancer of the lining of the lung or abdomen caused primarily by exposure to asbestos 20 or more years prior to diagnosis. Between 1988 and 1999, 81 men in northeastern Minnesota were diagnosed with mesothelioma. Normally, around 45 men would be expected to develop the illness in a population that size, over that period of time. The elevated rate of mesothelioma in northeastern Minnesota has been observed only in men, pointing to the likelihood of occupational exposure.

Because of ongoing community concern about the possible link between iron mining, a major industry in the northeast region, and the occurrence of cancer and related respiratory diseases, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) investigated the incidence of mesothelioma in iron miners and possible sources of exposure to asbestos in the mining industry. Researchers focused on commercial sources of asbestos, like insulation, a known cause of asbestos-related disease in many industries.

Because of mesothelioma's long latency period, researchers were particularly interested in exposure that occurred between the 1940's and 1970's. MDH investigators identified and studied a group of 17 men who had developed mesothelioma and who had also been employed in the mining industry. After reviewing available information about the jobs held by the 17 men, MDH investigators concluded that most of them probably did work that involved on-the-job exposure to commercial asbestos, in jobs held both inside and outside of the mining industry.

Based on the work experience of the men in the study, MDH investigators concluded that commercial asbestos exposure was the most likely explanation for their illness. This investigation was not a comprehensive study of dust exposure in the mining industry and its implications for the health of workers. Additional studies would need to be conducted for a comprehensive examination of health issues affecting miners. For more information, contact Alan Bender at 612-676-5216 or alan.bender@health.state.mn.us.

Asthma Mortality in Minnesota



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MDH Asthma Website

For more information about asthma or to download the strategic plan, check out our website at:

www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/

After steady increases in asthma-related mortality, or deaths due to asthma in the 1990s, it appears that the rate has leveled off and may be starting to decline. A similar trend has been observed at the national level.

Between 1999 and 2001 there were 269 deaths for which asthma was the underlying cause of death. Seventy percent of these deaths were in persons 65 years of age or older, for whom misdiagnosis is most likely. Sixty-seven percent of these deaths were in women.

Information on asthma mortality comes from death certificates, through the Center for Health Statistics at the Minnesota Department of Health. The major limitation with death certificates is that they are known to be inaccurate in many cases, as they may be filled out by someone not familiar with the medical history of the deceased. This is compounded by the difficulty in diagnosing asthma in older people—it is difficult to distinguish asthma from other forms of chronic respiratory disease seen in this age group. But, to date, death certificates are the only source of information for asthma mortality.

For more information, contact Wendy Brunner at 612-676-5541 or wendy.brunner@health.state.mn.us.

Asthma Study in Selected Greater Minnesota Middle Schools

In March of 2003, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Asthma Program began a new initiative to study the burden of asthma in Greater Minnesota middle school children. Approximately two schools from various regions around the state are participating in this two-year study. The first of two asthma surveys are currently being taken. Students were asked questions regarding their respiratory health, activities, and medical utilization. The Asthma Program is working on a partnership with the MDH Indoor Air Unit to assist with indoor air quality assessments and management plans for the participating schools. Additionally, the Asthma Program is developing an asthma training module for school staff to implement in participating schools.

Schools in the following communities participated in the initial survey: Akeley, Alexandria, Austin, Bemidji, Cold Spring, Fergus Falls, Hackensack, Keewatin, Little Falls, Mankato, Marshall, Nashwauk, Pelican Rapids, St. Cloud, St. James, Walker, Willmar, and Winona.

If you would like more information about this study, please contact Andrea Todd at (612) 676-5049 or andrea.todd@health.state.mn.us.

Upcoming Events

Commissioner's Work Group Reconvened

June 11, 2003, 1 - 4 pm
Snelling Office Park,
Mississippi Room, St. Paul, MN
612-676-5226

Coding and Reimbursement Training

June 12, 2003, 12:30 - 4:00 pm
Metropolitan Ballroom,
Golden Valley, MN
Amy Reasoner, 651-223-9567

Minnesota Asthma Coalition Annual Meeting

June 12, 2003, 4:15-5:45 pm, Metro-
politan Ballroom, Golden Valley, MN
April Athmann, 651-268-7615

Richard T. Cushing Memorial Lecture

June 12, 2003, 6 - 9 pm, Metropolitan
Ballroom, Golden Valley, MN
Speaker: Michael Welch, M.D.
Glory Dennison, 651-227-8014

2003 National Conference on Asthma

June 19-21, 2003, Washington, D.C.
www.asthma2003.net

PACE Training

June 20-21, 2003
Holiday Inn, St. Cloud
April Athmann, 651-268-7615

Asthma Educator Certificate Course

October 29-30, 2003
Location to be determined
Glory Dennison 651-227-8014,
1-800-LUNGUSA, or
glory.dennison@alamn.org

Check It Out

Check out these websites for more information about asthma:

www.alamn.org/InfoCenter/

www.nhlbisupport.com/asthma

www.asthma.ca

http://pbskids.org/arthur/grownups/health_tips/asthma.html

www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/asthma/default.htm

Minnesota Asthma Information Center

The American Lung Association of Minnesota (ALAMN) has created a web-based clearinghouse, the Minnesota Asthma Information Center. There are two components to the site: one provides information for people living with asthma and their families, and the other is for professionals and providers.

The Patient and Family component contains information about asthma, community services, medication, food allergies, caring for asthma in school and at childcare, educational computer games, and links to other asthma resources. The Professional/Provider component contains information about educational materials for patients and families, community services, asthma-related research articles, continuing education opportunities, and links to other asthma resources.

Check out the Minnesota Asthma Information Center at www.alamn.org/InfoCenter/

On-Line Asthma Action Plan

The Asthma Action Plan (AAP) is a tool to help asthma patients and medical professionals manage and prevent asthma symptoms while providing information that is crucial to those who come in contact with or care for people with asthma.

The action plan is meant to be shared with any individual who may in some way be responsible for caring for or assisting with the asthma patient. Examples of individuals who should have a copy of the AAP are: school nurses; other specialty medical providers; daycare providers; parents; coaches; grandparents; anyone who may be responsible for providing care for the patient in case of an emergency; and the asthma patient.

MDH staff, with assistance from an advisory group and CIT (a computer company), created an on-line version of an Asthma Action Plan based on the NIH/NHLBI asthma guidelines (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/asthgdln.htm). This on-line AAP will be launched on the MDH asthma website (www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma/) on June 11, 2003.

Thank you to the members of the clinical advisory group who assisted in the development of the AAP: Gail Brottman, MD – Hennepin County Medical Center; Stephanie Bisson-Belseth, CPNP – Minneapolis Public Schools; Christine Rhodes-Dekko, MD – Central Pediatrics; Don Uden, PharmD – University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy; Kay Kufahl RCP, AE-C – Pediatric Home Services; Karen Mathias CNS – Minneapolis Childrens Hospital ER; Deborah Haider RCP, AE-C – MN Society for Respiratory Care; Mark Bixby MD – North Memorial Family Practice; and Lyann Yates MPH, RN – American Lung Association MN.

For more information about the AAP, contact Susan Ross at 612-676-5629 or susan.ross@health.state.mn.us.

Questions about lung health?

Call 1-800-548-8252
American Lung Association
Call Center

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For more information, or to request this material in another format contact: Deb Hill at 612-676-5213 or deborah.hill@health.state.mn.us
MN Relay Service TDD: 1-800-627-3528

Breathing Space is also available on the MDH Asthma website:
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/cdee/asthma

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PACE Training Update

The Central Minnesota Regional Asthma Coalition and American Lung Association of Minnesota (ALAMN) will be holding its first "Setting the PACE in Minnesota" seminar on Friday, June 20, and Saturday, June 21, 2003, at the Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, MN. PACE (Provider Asthma Care Education) is a multi-faceted seminar, developed to improve physician awareness, attitudes, ability, and application of communication and therapeutic skills about asthma. This seminar is a new asthma training and will soon be offered in other regions of Minnesota.

This training is open to physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners. For further information, contact April Athmann at ALAMN at 651-268-7615 or april.athmann@alamn.org.

Women Surpass Men in COPD Deaths

Deaths from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) grew much faster in women than in men over the past 20 years. In 2000, for the first time, more women than men died from COPD. COPD is a group of airflow conditions, including chronic bronchitis and emphysema, that usually cause chronic cough, shortness of breath, expectoration, or wheezing.

The data show that 59,936 women and 59,118 men died from COPD in 2000. The good news: The percentage of the population 55 years or older with COPD decreased, which may signal an end to the upward trend in COPD hospitalizations and deaths. To read more, go to www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5106a1.htm.



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